THE CENSUS OF QUIRINIUS

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Introduction

Regarding the *census* of Quirinius, Luke states the following in *Luke* chapter 2, verses 1-2:

> In those days it occured that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that a census (απογραφω) should be taken of all the inhabited earth (οικυμενη). This was the first (πρωτη) enrollment taken while Kurenios was governor (ήγεμονευω) of Syria.[1]

Many researchers have already tried to determine the date of the *census,* as it is the date that Jesus' birth is based on the above-mentioned verses. Depending on how much they accepted Luke's data accurate, results fall between 12 B.C.E. and 6 C.E. No consensus has been established so far. We can see scientific debates back from the 1860's about as little details as Quirinius could be *proconsul* in the province of *Asia*. In his book, Wieseler states[2] that Quirinius could not be *proconsul* in *Asia* around 6 B.C.E., since - regarding Florus[3] - Quirinius was the *proconsul* of *Africa* at that time, and no one that we have knowledge of held an office twice in Roman history. But even if someone had done, leading a campaign against the Homonadenses in *Cilicia* would have been too far from a province without a legion. For this, Wieseler assumed that the war against the Homonadenses took place around the time Jesus was born. However, no more than a year later, Thomas Lewin replied[4] oppositely to all of these arguments, and said that Quirinius could have

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1 Translation mine.

2 Karl Wieseler, *A Chronological Synopsis of the Four Gospels*(London: Bell and Daldy, 1864),130–1.

3 Flor. *Epit.* IV.12.40

4 Thomas Lewin, *Fasti Sacri, Or A Key to the Chronology of the New Testament* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1865), 133.

been *proconsul* in *Asia*. With the debates continuing up till now, Brindle sees the root of the problem in that Luke's description seemingly cannot be conciliated with the historical facts.[5]

Enrollments of Augustus

In order to determine the date of the *census*, first of all one have to review the enrollments concerning the whole Empire ordered by Augustus.

According to the Res gestae Divi Augusti,[6] Augustus ordered three imperial enrollments, one in 28 B.C.E., which was too early for us to take account of, one in 14 C.E. which was too late correlated with the date of Herod's death, remaining the only possible date is the third one in 8 B.C.E.

Therefore the birth of Jesus must have taken place between the time of execution of the imperial census (around 8 B.C.E.), and Herod's death (approx. 4 B.C.E.). Some scholars are trying to simplify the question stating that Jesus' birth in Matthew is not consistent with Luke's writing, based on that it is clear from *Mt* 2:1 that Herod was alive at the time of Jesus' birth, but in Luke it is not self-evident. However, one doesn't need to suppose this to resolve the problem.

According to Luke's words, lots of questions are raised. Is it possible to hold a *census* under Herod, before Israel became a Roman province? Is Publius Sculpicius Quirinius the only person who could be behind the Greek word *Kurenios*? There are indeed other candidates as well, some are serious (like Caius Sentius Saturninus), some are not. For example, Rist states that Kurenios is Quinctilius Varus,[7] but his arguments are demolished by Barnes, who states that this theory is simply nonsense, making "the evidence say what he wants it to say rather than what it actually says".[8]

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5 Wayne Brindle, "The Census and Quirinius: Luke 2:2.," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 27/1 (1984):43.

6 Aug. *RG* 8:3-4.

7 John M. Rist, "Luke 2: 2: Making sense of the date of Jesus' birth," *The Journal of Theological Studies 56, no. 2*(October 2005): 489–91

8 Timothy D. Barnes, ""Another Shall Gird Thee": Probative Evidence for the Death for Peter," in *Peter in Early Christianity,* ed.Helen K. Bond and Larry W. Hurtado (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company,Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2015), 76–7.

Kurenios as Saturninus

Before I move on, let's discuss the question of the person of *Kurenios* mentioned by Luke. A possible nominee is Saturninus who was legate of Syria between 9 and 7 B.C.E., the exact same period of time during which Jesus was born. In 7 B.C.E., Saturninus was sent away (most likely to *Germania*),[9] and Publius Quinctilius Varus arrived to replace him with four legions from *Africa*, around the autumn of 6 B.C.E.[10] That would make Saturninus a proper candidate.

Waltz for example is one of the scholars who thinks that Saturninus can be the person that is mentioned by Luke.[11] Waltz states that the latin S was often written similarly to Greek sigma for the sake of easier engraving on stone. Sigma was written as C in most uncial texts, and C could be (easily) falsely transliterated as K, for which we can find numerous antique examples. However, most latin translations write "Cyrino" to which the nearest Roman name is Quirinius, obviously. Moreover, we do not have any specific source at all that would prove Waltz' supposition, which also counts with significant corruption of the text, moreover it explains only the first letter, therefore this speculation remains only a weak hypothesis.

Brown also thinks it is possible that Kurenios means Saturninus, and invokes Tertullian for his argument, but also acknowledges that this theory doesn't have any written evidence.[12] And without a manuscript that translates directly Kurenios to Saturninus, this alteration would mean too much text deterioration, therefore one can exclude it.

Tertullian about Saturninus

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9 Ronald Syme, *The Augustan Aristocracy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 85.

10 Edward Dąbrowa, "The Date of the Census of Quirinius and the Chronology of the Governors of the Province of Syria," Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik, Bd. 178 (2011): 140; Emil Schürer, Fergus Millar and Géza Vermes, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ* (Oxford: Bloomsbury, 2014)vol I., 257.

11 Robert B. Waltz, *The Bible in History – A chronological and biological guide to the Hebrew and Greek Testaments* (Robert B. Waltz, 2013), 45.

12 Raymond Edward Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in Matthew and Luke* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1977), 553.

The picture gets complicated again when Tertullian also ties the time of Jesus' birth to Saturninus. Tertullian writes the following:[13]

> But census was made during the time of Augustus in Judea by Sentius Saturninus, that serves as a proof to us in reference to Jesus' family.[14]

Thus Tertullian considers Saturninus the person in charge in the time of the census when Jesus was born. Furthermore, Tertullian gives the nomen (Sentius), too, while Luke writes only the cognomen (Quirinius). This also shows the relevant fact that Tertullian must have had access to independent (roman) historical proofs in connection with the census under Jesus' birth was born. Nota Bene: even he himself refers to such data that they are generally accessible.

However, since Tertullian had never ever questioned the authenticity of the Bible, how could he ignore that Luke didn't mention Saturninus? (Because, for example, Tertullian and Iustinus must have had the word "Kurenios" in their Greek Bible, and not the Latin version). Tertullian would not alter a biblical name without explaining the reason behind it.[15] One can see how faithful he is to the text when one considers that Tertullian calculates Jesus' birth to Augustus' 41. year,[16] which contradicts the dates of all of the *censuses*, but aligns with Iustinus[17] and it is clearly based on a word-by-word translation of Lk 3:1 and 3:23, which says that Jesus was 30 years old (*ὡσει ἐτων τριακοντα*) in the fifteenth year of Tiberius (29 C.E.). But the words of Luke here means more like "Jesus was about 30 years old" instead of an exact definition.

Furthermore, if we presume that Tertullian had a text containing Saturninus in Lk 2:2, in this case it is also not likely that Tertullian did not have any other sources and didn't even mention the multiple possibilities. Tertullian knew the work of Iustinus[18] well, who mentions *Lk* 2:2 as Jesus having been born while Quirinius was *procurator* in Syria.[19]

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13 Tert. *Adv.*I. 4:19.

14 Translation mine.

15 Kokkinos Nikos, "The Relative Chronology of the Nativity in Tertullian," in *Chronos, Kairos, Christos II. Chronological, Nativity and Religious Studies in Memory of Ray Summers,* ed. E. Jerry Vardaman (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1998), 122.

16 Tert. *Adv. Jud.*8.

17 Iust. *Ap*. 46.

18 Michael E. Hardwick, J*osephus as a Historical Source in Patristic Literature through Eusebius* (Atlanta GS: Scholars Press, 1989)*,* 47–50.

19 Iust. *Ap*. I.34.b; 46.

We can only conclude that Tertullian must have interpreted the sentence of Luke 2:2 in a way that Luke tells us about a *census* made *before* Quirinius was the governor in Syria. And in this case he had to translate the word *prote* using its meaning ”earlier” instead of its other meaning “first”. I am going to return to this grammatical question later on.

The titulus **Tiburtinus**

There is a marble slab (it can be found in the Vatican Museum currently), which was found in 1764 near the ancient Tibur, that contains the *cursus honorum* of a Roman officer. Figuring out the man who is referred in *titulus* Tiburtinus caused not once fierce debates among historians. For example, Kokkinos connects the slab with Saturninus, as a much more likely candidate than either Titulis, Quirinius or Piso.[20] Answering to this suggestion, Eilers completely denies Saturninus in favor of Piso.[21] Alföldy – in the light of the above – argues that the person referred by the slab is no other than Quirinius, since[22]

- the “*legatus ... iterum Syrian ... optinuit*” should be understood that the person before became governor in Syria, was a *legate* somewhere else.
- Agreeing with Syme, also states that the offices are in ascendent order instead of reversed order.
- The senator mentioned by the text was awarded with medal of triumphator, which indicates that the person had to be a consul first.
- The candidate had to be consul between 18 B.C.E. and 8 C.E., and his first office as a *legate* must have been under Augustus. The man was still alive after Augustus had died, and buried in Tibur.
- In general, the cursus honorum of the person fits perfectly to the life of Quirinius, and matches with no other known general. Piso, for example, can be excluded, since his second legate was in Thracia instead of Syria. Alföldy also convincingly excludes basically everyone else (C. Valgius Rufus, C. Caelius Rufus, Galus Sulpcius, Q. Fabricius) with the argument that they were not

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[20] Nikos Kokkinos, “The Honorand Of The Titulus Tiburtinus: C. Sentius Saturninus?,”*Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 105 (1995): 21–6.

[21] Claude Eilers, “C. Sentius Saturninus, Piso Pontifex, And The Titulus Tiburtinus: A Reply,”*Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 110 (1996): 207–26.

[22] Géza Alföldy, “Titulus Tiburtinus. A legtöbbet vitatott római felirat problémái,”*Antik Tanulmányok* 42 (1998):117–28.

mentioned at all by the famous roman historians (e.g. Cassius Dio, Velleius, Suetonius), and the person referred by the titulus Tiburtinus must be one of Augustus' greatest general. These arguments were widely accepted later on.[23]

The legate and census(es) of Publius Sulpicius Quirinius

Among the Syrian *legates*, there's only Quirinius left as our candidate, whom we know that he became governor in Syria in 6 C.E., and in the same year he conducted a *census* in Israel.[24] The events shocked the people of Israel and even led to a revolt. Grüll argues that the main cause of this revolt was the new kind of oath and the raising cult of the Emperor.[25]

In case we translate *Lk* 2:2 as Jesus was born during this *census* in 6 C.E., we will come to a contradiction, because Herod had long been dead by then, but both Matthew, both Luke (in Lk 1:5) mentions Herod. Moreover, in this case Jesus would have died years before he was 30, but Luke states in *Lk* 3:1 and 23 that Jesus started his ministry (in 29 C.E.) in his thirties. Actually, Jesus was almost 40 years old when he died, which can be seen even from a dialogue in *Jn* 8:57, when the people around him state that he is "not yet fifty" - a strange observation if Jesus wouldn't be even 30, or even about 23 years old.

One can resolve this contradiction only if he assumes either that Quirinius was *legate* when Jesus was born (and therefore he held another *legate* position in *Syria* afterwards), or *Lk* 2:2 mentions an earlier *census*, prior to the one that was conducted in 6 C.E. The first possibility already contradicts with the text of *titulus* Tiburtinus, as I pointed out, but this question is so significant that further arguments must be considered to be able to exclude it without any doubt.

The Lapis Venetus

Although it became obvious that *titulus Tiburtinus* describes the career of Quirinius, there must be other considerations to be examined to exclude the possibility of Quirinius being *legate* in *Syria* prior B.C.E.

First, there was a little time difference between the end of Saturninus' governance (7 B.C.E.) and Varus' arrival (6 B.C.E.), which time could

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[23] E.g. Dąbrowa, "The Date of the Census," 138.

[24] Ios. *Ant.* XVII.13.5, XVIII.1.1, II.1

[25] Tibor Grüll, "A „hetvenes" zsidó háború történelmi emlékezete,"*Vallástudományi Szemle 5:3* (2009): 207–8.

have stretched from 6 months to 18 months. Because of this, it is possible that Quirinius – who was in Libia at that time – gained a temporary control over the region. This would absolutely solve the problem of *Lk* 2:1-2 verses, and doesn't require Quirinius to conduct the *census* in person, since that would mean that Luke is only referring to Quirinius as a dating reference point, to which I'll come back a bit later, but first let's discuss the question of the *Lapis Venetus*.

Another inscription which mentions Quirinius (this time directly) is an epitaph, the so-called *Lapis Venetus*. According to this epigraph, a roman officer (called Quintus Aemilius Secundus) performed a *census* of Apamea, commissioned by no other than Quirinius, who was the *legate* of Syria at that time. The genuineness of the epitaph was quickly questioned after it was found, but in 1880, another piece of it was discovered and scattered the doubts. The text says:

> Quintus Aemilius Secundus, son of Quintus, of the Palatine tribe, in the camps of the divine Augustus, when Quirinius was the imperial *legate* of *Syria*, was decorated with honors, prefect of a cohort from the I. August legion, prefect of the second fleet, also conducted a *census* by the order of Quirinius in Apamene city of 117 000 citizens; also I was sent by Quirinius against the ituraeans, on the mount Lebanon I captured their fortress; and before I was in the army and *prefect* of craft works, I was delegated by the two consuls to run the treasury, then in a colony as quaestor, aedile twice, duumvir twice, and pontifex. Laid to rest here Q. Aemilius, son of Quintus of the Palatine tribe, Secundus (other son?), and Aemilia Chia freedwoman. This tomb must have no more heirs![26]

Iturea was suffering continuously from raids at that time (possibly by Arabian tribes)[27], therefore Secundus didn't just punish one single hostile action or revolt, as it is sometimes referred. About dating the events, Brown notes that there are absolutely no proofs that the *census* in Apamea did not take place around 6 to 7 C.E.[28] Cotton also regards it as self-explanatory that the events happened in 6 C.E.[29] Moreover, if the revolt

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[26] Translation mine, and is partially based on Tibor Grüll, "*A kövek kiáltanak – 50 dokumentum az Újszövetség tanulmányozásához.*" (Budapest: Szent Pál Akadémia, 2009), 39.

[27] Fergus Millar, *The Roman Near East, 31 B.C. – A.D. 337* (London, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 273–4.

[28] Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah*, 553.

[29] Hannah M. Cotton, "The Roman Census in the Papyri from the Judaean Desert and the Egyptian katV oivki,an avpografh,," in*Semitic Papyrology in Context. (Culture and History of the Ancient Near East, vol. 14.),* ed. Lawrence E.

had taken place before 1 C.E., Quirinius must have been governor in Syria twice. But as we have seen it regarding the *titulus Tiburtinus*, it is not the case. Another argument is that the time between the government of Saturninus and Varus is maximum 1.5 years, which is simply too short for a *legate* to hold without leaving the position as a fallen politician,[30] and Quirinius surely didn't fall into that category, since his rank and reputation was growing steadily through time. Alföldy adds to this that we have no knowledge of anyone in roman history to hold the same province twice.[31]

Quirinius as secondary leader behind Saturninus

As the next step, in theory it is possible that Quirinius was not a *legate* at the time when Jesus was born, but instead, a co-leader. In this case, we know that at the time of the Augustine *census* in 8 B.C.E., Saturninus was the *legate* in *Syria*, therefore Quirinius must have been an officer under Saturninus for a short while. This is strengthened by the fact that Quirinius had a special relation with Augustus, as a person who had strong merits in the economic, organizational and military fields at the same time. This would mean that he was a *procurator* in *Syria* at the time when Jesus was born. And it was pretty common that military leaders and officers were helping the government to collect the census data.[32]

Iosephus writes in several places about Saturninus and Varus being governors at the same time.[33] This is surely not a slip of the pen from him, because regarding Varus and Silanus, Iosephus never mentions multiple governments.[34]*Legate*s had the right to nominate *procurator*s above a specific area within the province. The best example for this is *Iudaea* itself, and getting a *procurator* also means a partially independent state. Apart from this, assignment of general co-rulers within a single province was not a custom in the Roman Empire at all.[35] That means that – it is more than likely – Volumnius was only *procurator* under Saturninus. [36]Volumnius held his office until 8 B.C.E.,[37] which gives time to Quirinius to be *procurator* when Jesus was born.

Schiffman (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2003), 106-7.

30 Dąbrowa, "The Date of the Census," 141.

31 Alföldy, "Titulus Tiburtinus," 121.

32 Jack Pastor, *Land and Economy in Ancient Palestine* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 239.

33 Ios. *Ant.* XVI.9.1, 10.8

34 Ios. *Ant.* XVII.5.2., 9.3; XVIII.2.4

35 Andrew Lintott, *Imperium Romanum: Politics and Administration* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1993), 43.

The word governor in *Lk* 2:2 (ἡγεμονευω) does not mean only *legate*, but instead, multiple offices, e.g. *procurator*. Quirinius had several titles in his life:[38] governor in *Crete* and *Cyrene* (14 B.C.E.), was chosen as *consul* (12 B.C.E.), *legate Galatia* and *Pamphylia*(6/5-3 B.C.E.), *proconsul* of *Asia* (~2 B.C.E. - 5 C.E.),[39]chief advisor of Caius (grandson of Augustus, in 2 B.C.E.) and *legate* of *Syria* from 6 C.E.

Luke uses the same word (ἡγεμονευω) in *Lk* 3:1 regarding Pilate, with the same phrase as it appears in *Lk* 2:2. But contrary to Quirinius, Pilate was *praefectus Iudaea* and not a *legate*.[40] The difference is that the *praefectus* was performing public administration tasks, while the *procurator* was mainly a treasurer, and is directly under the emperor.[41] The word (ἡγεμονευω) means mostly *praefect*, but sometimes other leaders, e.g. *procurator* (like Felix is in *Lk* 23:24). Luke and Iosephus were close together in time and in style, too, and Iosephus also called *praefect* a *procurator*.[42] Based on that and the fact that Tacitus also writes the same way, one can conclude that with the introduction of the *procurator* title, Claudius didn't create a genuine office, but (at least the early) *procurator*s were also *preafects*.[43]

And the picture gets even more complicated when one takes into account that there was not only a provincial *legate* office, but the leaders of the legions were also called *legates*, when there was more than one legion in a *province*. The *legatus legionis* was the head of a legion, while

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[36] See Ios. *BJ* 27.1.2. This supposition is also supported by the fact that Iosephus is inconsistent about the naming of Volumnius' office, once he calls it *epistratounton* (Ios. *BJ* I.27.1), and once *stratopedarkhen* (Ios. *BJ* I.27.2). See: Schürer, Millar and Vermes, *The History of the Jewish People vol.* I., 257.

[37] William Horbury, *Messianism Among Jews and Christians: Biblical and Historical Studies* (London, New York: T&T Clark LTD, 2003), 117; John Robinson, *A Theological, Biblical and Ecclesiastical Dictionary* (London, Sherwood: Gilbert, & Piper, 1835), 328.

[38] Richard R. Losch, *All the People in the Bible: An A-Z Guide to the Saints, Scoundrels, and Other Characters in Scripture* (Cambridge, Michigan: Grand Rapids – Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2008), 352.

[39] Alföldy, "Titulus Tiburtinus", 125.

[40] James Vardaman, "New inscription which mentions Pilate as "prefect"," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 81.1 (March 1962), 70–1.

[41] Steve Mason, *Flavius Iosephus,Translation and Commentary. Vol. 1B.*(Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2008), 16.

[42] Ibid. 80.

[43] Ibid.

the *legatus pro praetore* was a leader of a *province* when there was no legion, or only one legion stationed in the province.[44]

All this means that the actual type of government in the text of Luke can be understood in multiple ways regarding the position of Quirinius. Based on these, several scholar tried to justify that Quirinius was indeed *procurator*. This paper shows only one, Vardaman's.

Iustinus and Jerry Vardaman about Quirinius being procurator

Although Iustinus himself refers to Quirinius as a *procurator*,[45] this cannot be an accurate term. A *procurator* is only chosen from the lower *equestrian* order, and if we only consider the description of Quirinius by Tacitus,[46]Iustinus had to be inaccurate in his wording.

Jerry Vardaman is one of the few who thinks that Iustinus had been in lesser position since 11 B.C.E. till Herod's death. This is based on a non-published finding of "micro letters" on a small coin. Nonetheless McRay accepted Vardaman's state without any critic.[47] Vardaman himself also cited these "results",[48] but the scientists remained sceptic and refused both the concept of the micro letters and – as a result – the dating of Jesus' birth to 12 B.C.E., too.[49] As Ogg states, it is no question regarding that Quirinius was a *legate* in *Syria*, and Luke didn't mention another office he held there before 6 A.D.[50]

With no other possibility remaining, Quirinius must have been *legate* in Syria at the first time in 6 A.D., and he wasn't a regional leader at the time of Jesus' birth.

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44 Géza Alföldy, *Római társadalomtörténet*(Budapest: Osiris, 2000), 120.

45 Iust. *Ap*. I.34.b

46 Tac. *Ann.* 3:48

47 John McRay, *Archaeology and the New Testament.*, 154

48 Jerry Vardaman, "Jesus' Life: A New Chronology,"in *Chronos, Kairos, Christos. Nativity and Chronological Studies Presented to Jack Finegan*, ed. Jerry Vardaman, Edwin M. Yamauchi (Winona Lake IN: Eisenbraus, 1989), 66-7; Robert W. Smith, "New Evidence regarding Early Christian Chronology: A Reconsideration," in *Chronos, Kairos, Christos II. Chronological, Nativity and Religious Studies in Memory of Ray Summers*, ed. JerryVardaman (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1998) 133–9.

49 See for example Joseph David Rhodes, *The First Nativity (Part II): History and Theology of Our Incarnate Lord and Saviour* (Rhodes' Educational Ministries, 2015), 234.

50 George Ogg, "The Quirinius Question To-day," *Expository Times* 79(1968): 232.

Lk 2:2 states a *census* before Quirinius was legate of Syria

If Luke didn't mean a prior office of Quirinius at the time of Jesus' birth, then logically the only possible explanation is that Luke used the word πρωτη not in the sense of "first", but in the meaning of "before" or "earlier". This view is accepted widely.[51] So the verse should be translated like this:

> "This enrollment happened earlier when the governor in Syria was Quirinius."

Or

> "This enrollment happened earlier of Quirinius being the governor of Syria"

Barnett describes this option as a "less attractive" but possible one, and he also argues for it.[52]Armand Puig I Tàrrech sums up brilliantly the pros and cons, then argues that translating the word as "before" is totally legitimate, referring to lots of scholars, such as Husch, Porter, Lagrange, Heichelheim, Camps, Turner and others.[53]

But can we translate the sentence like this? We can state the following:

– In Greek, using the word prwth in this meaning is not uncommon, especially in the works of Luke. In the Bible, e.g. John 1:15 and 30 is using the word similarly, and it is not without other example in Luke's work, if we consider Acts 1:1.[54]

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[51] Most of the authors that are mentioned in this paper share this opinion. One of the few objections is of Klaus Rosen's, who thinks the word order is the same as the word order of the common *census* notes. See: Klaus Rosen, "Jesu Geburtsdatum, der Census des Quirinius une eine Jüdische Steuererklärung aus dem Jahr 127 n.C.," *Jahrbuch für antike Christentum 38* (1995), 5–15. The main objection against Rosen's argument is that it shows a possibility, assuming that the sentence is in Genitive Absolutus, but in my opinion it's not the case.

[52] Paul Barnett, *Is the New Testament Reliable?* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 150.

[53] Armand Puig I Tàrrech, "Why Was Jesus Not Born in Nazareth?," in *Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus*, ed. Tom Holmén and Stanley E. Porter (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2011), 3428–9

[54] Noah Webster, *The holy Bible, containing the Old and New Testaments, in the Common Version* (New Haven: Durrie & Peck, 1833; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1987), 1862. Citation refers to the Baker House edition.

– The sentence structure is only seemingly Genitive Absolutus, while it is in fact an Active Participle.

To sum up, we can state that though the above sentence in Greek is a bit unusual (generally speaking), it can be interpreted in the above meaning without grammatically corrupting the text, since none of its elements are irregular or unprecedented.

The two censuses of the Bible

The book of *Acts* ch 5 verse 37 obviously refers to the *census* which was taken by Quirinius in 6 C.E. Luke states that this was "The census", by which Luke differentiates this census from the one mentioned in Lk 2:2. Nota Bene: the person referred in *Acts* 5:37 (Judas of Galilee) is also mentioned by Iosephus in reference to the *census* in 6 A.D.[55]One big difference between the two *census*es is that the second one cannot be linked to a world-wide *census*, since it was in connection with creating the new Iudaea province.

Géza Alföldy and others (for example István Hahn) argue that the author in Lk 2:2 sets the two censuses against each other, where the later one (in 6 A.D.) turned to be the darkest hour of Israel, when the country lost its freedom, while the first census (took place when Jesus was born) became the greatest divine visit.[56]

About the *censuses* of Rome

The *census* of Augustus didn't finish within one calendar year at all (considering the whole empire). The first enrollment happened in Gaul (Gallia) in 12 B.C.E.,[57] which was followed by the idea of an empire-wide census, in 12 or 11 B.C.E.[58] In the following years censuses were held in Syria-Cilicia (probably in 9-7 B.C.E),[59] Egypt in 9 B.C.E.,[60] Rome in 8

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55 Jos. *Ant.* XVIII.1.6.

56 Alföldy, "Titulus Tiburtinus," 119.

57 Vardaman, "Jesus' Life: A New Chronology," 64.

58 Dio 54:35:1

59 William Mitchell Ramsay, *Was Christ born at Bethlehem? A Study on the Credibility of St. Luke,* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1898), 154-56. According to Ramsay, Tertullian could not have written about Saturninus and the *census*, unless he was aware of the *census* in Syria in 9-7 B.C.E.

B.C.E., Cyrene in 7 B.C.E.,[61] and sometime about then in Israel, too, but the exact date was not recorded, therefore it must be calculated from other circumstances.

Comparing the censuses of 8B.C.E. and 6C.E.

There had been changes in the Roman Empire by the time of 6 C.E., namely the income of August started to decline, when he established a new military treasure, the *aerarium militare*,[62] and he needed new sources for filling it. In the light of this, reorganizing Israel into a province was partially a financial need, too. During this event Coponius took over the place of Archelaus, the *ethnarch*, and Quirinius was appointed as *legate* of Syria and by this, he was legate of Israel too, considering that Israel became part of *Syria*.

As we can see, this was a totally different *census* than the one when Jesus was born. During the first *census*, it is presumable that Herod used the inner administration of the jewish state, where everyone was registered according to the land of the ancestors of the people.[63] The kings of Judea were treated as roman governors,[64] therefore the Kingdom of Judea (as a partner kingdom) was included in the *census* of Augustus.

The *census* in 6 C.E. was conducted rather differently. As Tàrrech concludes, the *trubutum soli* (tax based on property) was introduced.[65]This makes the *census* of Quirinius to be the first real roman *census*.

***Censuses* in Egypt**

It is seemingly uncommon for Rome to ask the people of the land to go to the place of their origin for a *census*. However, it was the case in Egypt too, where there was a *census* held in every 14 years from 34 C.E.[66] This is

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[60] William Mitchell Ramsay, *The Bearing of Recent Discovery on the Trustworthiness of the New Testament*(London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1915), 25.

[61] Vardaman, "Jesus' Life: A New Chronology," 64.

[62] Sara Elise Phang, *Roman Military Service* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 163.

[63] *Num* 1:18, *Lev* 25:10

[64] Gerard Gertoux, *Herod the Great and Jesus: Chronological, Historical and Archaeological Evidence*, (Lulu.com, 2015), 27.

[65] Tàrrech, "Why Was Jesus Not Born in Nazareth?," 3426–7.

[66] Jack Finegan, *Light from the Ancient Past.* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), 260.

related to the fact that people were registered above the age of 14 .[67]In Egypt, the roman leadership kept the local customs that the people should return to the land of their ancestors for the *census*. Therefore we can assume that Rome kept the local customs in Judea when it was only a partner kingdom to Rome.

Date of Augustus's oath of allegiance in Israel

Iosephus mentions an event when the citizens of the country had to take an oath of allegiance to Augustus, which was refused by 6 000 Pharisees.[68] Although Iosephus didn't mention the word *census*, instead he writes that Herod reacted with a fine to this refusal, by which one can assume that this was a *census* event. That this event was a *census* indeed, is suggested by many scholars, from Osorius[69] in 5th century to Barnett in the 21th.[70] Iosephus places the time of this oath of allegiance not long before the inauguration of Varus in 6 B.C.E,[71] and a short time after the letter of Augustus in 8 B.C.E.[72]

During the lawsuit of Alexander and Aristobulus, the *procurator* of *Syria* was Volumnius, therefore this event took place in 8 B.C.E.[73] Soon after – under Saturninus – Antipater went to Rome, so it was in 7 B.C.E., and we know that it was late in that year, since after 7 months of his departure he wrote a letter to his father Herod that he was going to travel back already,[74] and from the fact that as soon as he got back, he found himself in front of a jury, which was under Varus, who arrived in the fall of 6 B.C.E.[75] And because the oath was around the leave of Antipater, plus Tertullian also mentions Saturninus when Jesus was born, therefore all

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67 Grüll, *A kövek kiáltanak*, 37.

68 Ios. *Ant*. XVII.2.4

69 Oros. *Hist.* VI.22.7, VII.2.16.

70 PaulBarnett, *Jesus & the Rise of Early Christianity: A History of New Testament Times* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 107; Paul Barnett, "Apographe and Apographesthai in Luke 2:1-5," *Expository Times* 85 (1973/74): 378-79.

71 Ios. *Ant.* XVII.2 4., XVII.4.3.

72 Samuel Rocca, *Herod's Judaea: A Mediterranean State in the Classical World.*(Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008),151–2.

73 Ios. *BJ* 1. 27.

74 Ios *Ant.* XVII.4.3.

75 Ios. *Ant.*XVII.5.1–3; Ios. *BJ* I.31.5 – I.32.1.

data correlates with the year of 7 B.C.E. The *census* must have been conducted within one calendar year.[76]

From all of these events we can conclude that the augustian-herodian oath of allegiance was conducted in 7 B.C.E., and this oath is the very same as the *census* we are looking for.

Is it possible to hold a roman census under Herod?

For this, I start with a war of revenge which Herod led against arabian hordes in 9 B.C.E., [77]which is called the second Nabatean war.[78] Despite the fact that Saturninus was aware of the action, Herod was impeached before Augustus, who sent a message to Herod (in 8 B.C.E.) in which he stated that Herod is no longer his friend anymore, moreover, Israel lost its freedom as an independent kingdom, and from now on it became a tax-payer member state.[79] From this point, Herod did everything in his power to conciliate Augustus, for example he sent two delegations one after the other. In the same year (8 B.C.E), two sons of Herod went to Rome for a trial. This is consistent with the fact that Herod agreed that a *census* should be held with an oath of allegiance to both himself and Augustus.

It is not without example that independent kingdoms held *censuses* in a Roman way: Tacitus mentiones one in *Cappadocia* under king Archelaos.[80] The *censuses* formed the basis of the two different direct taxes to Rome, the *tributum capitis* (tax based on income) and (the one introduced in *Iudaea* later) *tributum soli* (tax based on property). Before 6 C.E., therefore the base was the *tributum capitis* (avpografh), where each citizen paid an equal amount and not based on property.

In general *censuses* come with oath of allegiance, and there is no reference for an oath without a *census*. Moreover, Brown argues that the fact that Iosephus mentions it twice that Herod decreased the amount of tax for part of the citizens follows that there had to be *census* records.[81]

Conclusion regarding the roman *censuses*

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[76] Brook W. R. Pearson, "The Lucan Censuses, Revisited," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 61 (1999): 275.

[77] Ios. *Ant.* XVI.9.3.

[78] Rocca, *Herod's Judaea*, 151–2.

[79] Ios. *Ant.* XVI.9.3.

[80] Tac. *Ann* 6.41.

[81] Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah*, 552.

We can state that the Roman *censuses* came with oaths of allegiance, and there were no oaths taken without a *census*. Therefore we can identify the oath mentioned by Iosephus with the *census* conducted when Jesus was born. And in case Herod died in 4 B.C.E., the date of this *census* was in 7 B.C.E., therefore we have to make sure whether the usual dating of Herod's death is valid.

Date of Herod's death

Now we need to clarify one remaining question to settle down: the commonly accepted date of Herod's death, which is traditionally 4 B.C.E., is questioned by some scholars recently. Although according to Iosephus, the question seems self-evident,[82] objections have been raised by the scholars.

The first objection is that since Herod died not long before Pesach, and after a lunar eclipse,[83] in the year of 4 B.C.E., the time difference is too short between the two events for conducting the funeral.[84] But for example, in 1 B.C.E., it would be plenty of time for that. This argument is possible, but only a presumption.

The *breviarium totius imperii*

Another argument that Augustus introduced is a new kind of *census* in 2 B.C.E. According to Tacitus, Augustus prepared the *breviarium totius imperii*, a list of the resources of the Roman and allied territories, containing the exact number of the local forces, fleets and economic resources, including local taxes, direct and indirect expenditures.[85] As a consequence, it is probable that a *census* was held in Israel and Luke mentions this in *Lk* 2:1, therefore it still must have been under Herod. This argument is also a presumption, but also a possibility.

The War of Varus

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82 Ios. *BJ* I.33.8; Jos. *Ant.* XVII.8.1.

83 Ios. *Ant.* XVII.9.3, Jos. *BJ* II.1.3

84 For example: Ernest L. Martin, *The Star that Astonished the World* (Portland, OR: Academy for Scriptural Knowledge, 1991), 101-4.; Jack Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology, Rev. ed.* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1998), 300.

85 Tac. *Ann.* I:11,4

The next argument is according to the so-called "War of Varus", which is mentioned by Iosephus[86] and the Seder Olam, too,[87] but this war is completely missing from the Roman records and the work of historians. From this region and period there is only one war recorded from the Roman side, the Armenian campaign of Caius Julius Caesar,[88] who was wounded during the campaign in 3 C.E. Since this is the only occasion mentioning a war from this period, Gertoux argues that this was the war of Varus, therefore Herod must have died only at the time when Caius was appointed as the commander of the Eastern forces, in 1 B.C.E.[89]

Moreover, there was a general period of peace in the Roman Empire until 2 B.C.E., which makes it harder to allocate the war of Varus to 4 B.C.E., since – according to Tacitus – it happened right after Herod's death.[90] But Syme argues that the circumstances refer to a general peace period at this time.[91]

Interestingly the lack of the recorded data may be the solution for these assumptions. From the Roman history, the documented events are mostly entirely missing between 6 B.C.E and 4 C.E. (which is why historians called this era the "dark decade"),[92] and – interestingly – this is almost the very same case with Iosephus, who lacks detailing the period from 4 B.C.E. to 6 C.E. We can observe the same oddity at Dio, too.[93]

Arguments favour 4 B.C.E.

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86 Ios. *Ap.* I:34

87 Sed. Ol. 30. mentions the war, which is most probably the war of Varus, see e.g. Heinrich Walter Guggenheime,*Seder Olam: The Rabbinic View of Biblical Chronology* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2005), 262-3.; Kenneth R. Atkinson: "Herod the Great as Antiochus Redivivus: Reading the Testament of Moses as an Anti-Herodian Composition," *Of Scribes and Sages: Early Jewish Interpretation and Transmission of Scripture. Volume 1: Ancient versions and traditions,* ed. Craig A. Evans (London, New York: T & T Clark International - A Continuum imprint, 2004), 140.

88 Peter Michael Swan, *The Augustan Succession: An Historical Commentary on Cassius Dio's Roman History Books 55-56 (9 B.C.–A.D. 14)* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 127.

89 Gertoux, *Herod the Great and Jesus*, 42.

90 Dio V.9.

91 Ronald Syme, *Roman papers Vol. 3*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 912.

92 Timothy David Barnes, "The Victories of Augustus,"*The Journal of Roman Studies* Vol. 64 (1974): 22.

93 Syme, *Roman papers. 3,* 912.

Dio and Iosephus both confirm that the son of Herod, Arkhelaos started to reign in 4 B.C.E. instead of 2 B.C.E.

Barnes argues that[94]

- according to coins from that period, Arkhelaos, Antipas and Philip all started to reign in 4 B.C.E.;
- Varus was the legate of Syria (6 B.C.E. - 4 B.C.E.) at the time of Herod's death;
- Caius Caesar attended a hearing of Herod's three sons after Herod's death. After that, Caius remained in Rome for a while, until 2 B.C.E., when he was sent to the Limes at the river Danube, which makes 1 B.C.E. as year of death of Herod impossible.

None of the assumptions which question the date of 4 B.C.E. provide any proof, but on the other side, the arguments that confirm 4 B.C.E. are all consistent with each other, therefore we must not question them. As a conclusion, we can state that the missing Roman records regarding the war of Varus only further strengthen the fact that in the Roman history, there was indeed a period of time between roughly 6. B.C.E. to 4 C.E. which is called the dark decade because of lack of data.

Conclusion

As a conclusion, we can say the following:

- The person Kurenios is without any doubt Quirinius in Lk 2:2;
- Tertullian links the birth of Jesus to Saturninus, about which Tertullian had sources apart from the Bible.
- The census when Jesus was born can be distinguished clearly from the census of 6 C.E.
- There was a Roman census under Herod, as an execution of Augustus' decree;
- Every other possibility can be excluded, for example Quirinius being governor in Syria twice, or Quirinius being procurator of Syria, etc.
- Luke is aware of both censuses, which he distinguishes, therefore he couldn't link the first one to Quirinius, neither the global one to the second census. All other data in Luke is consistent and further strengthen this (mentioning Herod in Lk 1; remarks on Jesus' age;

[94] Timothy David Barnes, "Date of Herod's death," *Journal of Theological Studies* n.s. 19.1 (1968): 204-9.

the short mention of the second census in Acts 5:17). As a result, Luke and Matthew don't contain any contradiction.

The conclusion is that Lk 2:2 must be understood as the following:

"This enrollment happened before the governor in Syria was Quirinius."

Since the oath of Augustus in Iosephus' work can be linked to the first enrollment, its year is the same as the year of Jesus' birth, which is 7 B.C.E.

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Abbreviations of ancient authors and works

Aug. *RG*	Augustus	*Res Gestae*
Acts		*Acts of the Apostles*
Dio	Cassius Dio	*Historiae romanae*
Flor. *Epit*.	Florus	*Epitome de Tito Livio*
Ios. *Ant*.	Iosephus Flavius	*Antiquitates Judaicae*
Ios. *Ap*.	Iosephus Flavius	*Contra Apionem*
Ios. *BJ*	Iosephus Flavius	*De Bello Iudaico*
Iust. *Ap*.	Iustinus Martyr	*Apology*
John		*Gospel of John*
Lev		*Leviticus*
Luke		*Gospel of Luke*
MT		*Gospel of Matthew*
Num		*Numeri*
Oros. *Hist*.	Orosius	*Historiae adversus paganos*
Sed. Ol.		*Seder Olam Rabbah*
Tac. *Ann*.	Tacitus	*Annales*
Tert. *Adv*.	Tertullianus	*Adversus Marcionem*
Tert. *Adv. Jud.*	Tertullianus	*AdversusJudaeos*